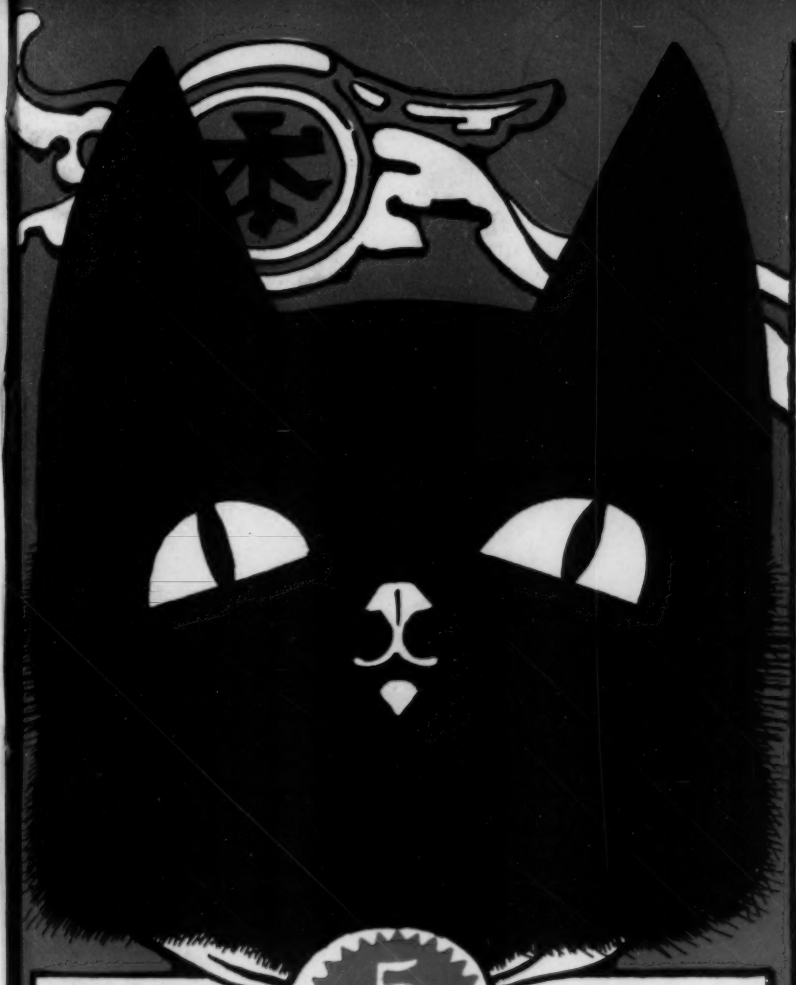

THE BLACK CAT

MAY 1904

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The Man Who Sold His Head.*

BY ELLIOTT FLOWER.

"A REMARKABLE head!" commented Dr. Linscott. "I wish I had it."

"If it's worth anything to you," returned Eugene Freer, gloomily, "you ought to have it, for it's worth nothing to me."

Freer was discouraged. He was not a particularly smart man, and he had lacked regular employment for some time. When a man who is past middle age and who has been a clerk all his life loses his place there does not seem to be much hope for him. Employers want young men for positions that do not require the expert knowledge that comes with experience. So Freer was having a hard time making a living, and he could not see that his head was of any value.

Dr. Linscott had a different opinion, however. Freer had come to him for a prescription for some slight ailment, and in entering had jarred an Indian war-club from its place above the door. The fact that the club landed on his head did not disturb him in the least, so the Doctor's interest was aroused. He discovered that the head was of unusual shape and apparently of unusual construction. The skull seemed to be about two inches thick, and

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there were other peculiarities that would be appreciated only by a physician who was making a study of abnormal cranial development.

"Oh, it may be worth something to you," said the Doctor, in reply to Freer's complaint. "How much will you take for it?"

Freer was startled.

"What good would money do me when my head's gone?" he asked.

"But I would expect to make payment in advance," explained the Doctor.

"You'd have to," asserted Freer. "A C. O. D. transaction wouldn't do at all."

"I can readily appreciate that," said the Doctor.

"If I waited to deliver the head before taking the money it would be very awkward," persisted Freer. "And then there is the question of spending the money. A fellow wants to have his head about him when he goes into any financial transactions. Otherwise, he will be cheated, sure."

"Oh, I would expect to leave the head in your keeping," returned the Doctor.

"For how long?" asked Freer, doubtfully.

"As long as you had any use for it."

"I wouldn't like to make one of these call-loan deals of it," explained Freer. "The uncertainty as to when it might be 'called' would be really distressing."

"Don't worry about that," urged the Doctor. "I admit that your head on your shoulders doesn't amount to much, in which it is very much like many other heads in this world; but your head in my hands would be of considerable value to medical science. I would like to examine it at my leisure, inside and out; I would like to see exactly what force is required to crack the skull; I would like to investigate the cause of its peculiar shape — indeed, there are a number of experiments I would like to make with and on that head of yours, and then, too, I think it would make a valuable addition to my collection of curious and abnormal skulls. But I have no desire to be unreasonable. I can quite understand your disinclination to have your skull put on a shelf as long as you have any personal use for it, so all I ask is that it shall come to me when you are dead."

"May I take my own time about dying?"

"So far as I am concerned, you may."

"That's very liberal of you."

"I think it is myself. Some people — in fact, most people — would not be willing to give their property into the keeping of another for an indefinite period, but I always was a generous and considerate man. If you sell me your head, you may have the use of it as long as you live, and I won't even charge you rent for it."

"Suppose you should die first?"

"In that case, I will bequeath it to a professional friend in whom I have the utmost confidence."

"I don't think I would like to have my head figuring in a will contest in the probate court," said Freer. "The judge might insist upon appointing another custodian for it, or he might insist that it be deposited with the clerk of the court. You never can tell what a judge will do."

"We will see that the provisions of the bill of sale guard against that."

"How much is the head worth to you?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"Cash?"

"No; I can't afford to pay that much down, but I'll give you five dollars a week in addition to giving you all necessary medical attention free of charge, and I'll pay you for a full month in advance now."

"Pass over the twenty," said Freer, reaching a sudden decision, "and I'll sign the bill of sale whenever it's ready. Twenty dollars looks mighty big to me just now, and a fellow with five dollars a week can't starve, anyhow."

The fact that he had money in his pocket made Freer reasonably contented when he left the Doctor's office, but later he began to worry a little. It seemed to him that a fellow who had no head of his own was indeed an unfortunate and poverty-stricken wretch, and certainly no self-respecting man would consent to be indebted to another for so important a part of his personal structure. It completely wrecked his independence. He could do nothing by himself, but had to rely on the generosity of a comparative

stranger for practically everything. It was the Doctor's property that enabled him to read. If he studied, he was improving the Doctor's mental equipment. The work that he did was a sort of combination — he used his own hands, but they were directed by the Doctor's brains, and he learned of the progress made through the Doctor's eyes. Sometimes he wondered if the Doctor were not entitled to part of the money he made out of the occasional employment that he secured, but the Doctor's assurance that he would not charge him rent for the head seemed to dispose of this question. Still, it was humiliating to have to make such personal use of another's property.

"Anyway," he argued to himself, "it was a good bargain, for I also get medical attention free. Now, if I'm sick — " He stopped with a sudden gasp. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed, "wouldn't I be a fool to let the owner of this head pour any drugs into me? If he happened to get impatient for it, what kind of a chance would I stand?"

With this idea in mind he took the first opportunity to inform the Doctor that he would not call upon him for any professional services.

"Haven't you confidence in my professional skill?" asked the Doctor.

"I have too much confidence in it," answered Freer. "I have so much confidence in it that I don't like to put temptation in your way. You might want the head, and I wouldn't like to make it too easy for you to get it."

"But it's my head," urged the Doctor, "and I have a right to see that it receives proper care and attention. If you have any lung or heart trouble, it may be all right to go to another physician, but if anything goes wrong with my head, you ought to bring it to me."

"You can inspect it from time to time to see that it's in good condition and receiving proper care," suggested Freer, "but really I'm a good deal interested in looking out for that head myself."

"True," admitted the Doctor, "but your interest is divided — the head is not your sole care, as it is mine — and I certainly must caution you to be careful. If you want to break an arm or a leg or a rib, why it's your business, but don't let a brick or any-

thing fall on the head. As the custodian of my property, you must be unusually cautious. If it got smashed it would be valueless to me."

"And to me," remarked Freer.

"Of course, of course," the Doctor conceded. "I guess, on the whole, I can afford to content myself with an occasional examination."

For some time after this all ran so smoothly that Freer became reconciled to his bargain. He was now fortunate enough to have a little work to do, and he went once a week to the Doctor's office to get his five dollars. This was paid without question or comment at first, but later the Doctor became irritable and unreasonable. Very likely this was due to the fact that his investment in the head was becoming considerable, and consequently the risk worried him. The day that Freer appeared with a black eye he was positively angry.

"You've been abusing my head," he exclaimed, "and I won't stand it. You've no right to put it in jeopardy by fighting. Think of how my interests would have been harmed if the other fellow had taken a meat-cleaver to it."

"And my interests, too," suggested Freer.

On another occasion the Doctor called across the street to Freer: "Hi, there! bring my head over here!" which made people turn and look at Freer, to his great discomfort. And, to make matters worse, the Doctor at once began to upbraid him for passing under a scaffolding that held a number of carpenters. "Suppose one of them had dropped a hammer on my head!" exclaimed the Doctor. "I tell you you're not treating me right in this matter. It's outrageous that you should expose my head to such danger."

A crowd naturally gathered.

"I wish to thunder you had your old head!" retorted Freer, angrily.

"Well, why don't you give it to me?" demanded the Doctor. "It's because you're too mean; you're going to live to the end of the hundred payments just to be ugly. Science is nothing to you; the fact that the world waits anxiously for the knowledge that I will glean from that head makes no impression on you at all. You

lack consideration — all you can think of is money. But you've got to be careful, or I'll go into court and have you fined for making improper use of my property."

As time passed the Doctor showed many signs of increasing impatience. Whenever and wherever he met Freer he peremptorily ordered him to submit his head for examination — to the great amazement of strangers; and Freer often found other physicians with the Doctor when he called to get his payments. On these occasions the Doctor demonstrated his proprietary interest in the head in a way that was annoying.

"What do you think of my purchase?" he asked one day. "Bring it over here, Freer." And Freer had to submit to an examination and listen to a learned discussion, after which the Doctor produced a heavy plate and broke it over Freer's head.

"You've no right to do that!" cried Freer.

"Oh, that's all right," returned the Doctor. "It was a risk, of course, but I was willing to take it in order to demonstrate a point to these skeptics." Then he took them all to an inner room where a row of skulls stood on a shelf. "There are some very curious specimens there," he explained, "but," and he placed his hand on the head that Freer was using, "I believe this to be more remarkable than any of them, and you will note that I have reserved a place of honor for it." He pointed to a vacant space near the middle of the shelf. "When this man," he went on, indicating Freer, "is considerate enough to deliver the goods I shall be glad to have your assistance in the ensuing investigation. It will, I think, prove a delightful and instructive task."

Freer left, with a picture impressed on his mind that was disturbing; he could see his own skull in the centre of that row, and he could also see those cold-blooded doctors deep in the study of it. That isn't a pleasant sort of a vision for a man to have with him always. Added to the annoyance and humiliation of having no head of his own in life, it made his position almost unbearable, and, after some thought, he went to a police station.

"I don't see what we can do," said the Captain, when the matter was explained to him. "A man's head is always worth what he can get for it, and, if he wants to sell it, it's his own business. If some one else sold your head, it would be different.

I don't think we could permit a brokerage business in living heads, as a matter of public policy, but — "

"That's it," broke in Freer. "Public policy! Such a bargain as this must be against public policy, and consequently void."

"Perhaps," conceded the Captain, "but you'd have to get a ruling of court on that. So far as I'm concerned, we can only get at the question through the gambling laws, and I doubt very much if that would be satisfactory. As I understand it, if you die before all the payments are made, the Doctor wins that much."

"He gets the head without paying the full price," said Freer, "and that's what makes him so ugly. He thinks I ought to die."

"In that case," asserted the Captain, "it's a gamble, a game of chance."

"Can you raid it?" asked Freer, anxiously.

"We can raid anything, but the trouble is that we're compelled to seize all that pertains to the game in progress, and in this instance that would include the head."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Freer, "I don't want any more people to have claims to that head."

"And, anyway," continued the Captain, "we might not be able to make a case. It's quite possible that this might be considered speculation rather than gambling. I guess the only thing for you to do is to buy back your head."

But what chance had Freer to buy back the head? The Doctor would probably demand a premium, and where could he get the necessary money? Apparently the only thing of value he had was the head, and he could not hypothecate that while the title rested in another, even if any one else would be willing to accept it as security.

"And, besides," argued Freer, "that wouldn't help matters any. If I can't have title to the head myself, I might as well leave it with the Doctor. Another owner might be even more disagreeable than he is. No; there's no hope for me. I'll never have a head of my own again, and there's mighty little satisfaction or pleasure in using another man's. If I happened to be married now, I wonder what my wife would say to a headless husband. It's a most extraordinary predicament — and so complicated. Why, if I didn't have to carry this other fellow's head about with me, I

could go on exhibition at a dime museum as the headless man and easily get enough money to buy back what is necessary to make a complete man of myself."

Thus a year passed, during which Freer frequently speculated on the joy of being a whole person, for the doctor became more and more dictatorial. He even prepared a set of rules for Freer's guidance, and his references to prospective experiments with his purchased skull were of a nature to produce a most disquieting effect. He also made sarcastic comments on the mercenary spirit that induced Freer to hang on for the full purchase price. Then, too, when discussing the subject with others in Freer's presence, he gloated over his acquisition, and he pointed out the exact spot where he planned to pierce the skull at some later date.

But relief came at last, in the form of a legacy to Freer. It wasn't a large one, being only $10,000 out of a large estate left by a distant relative, but it was a fortune to Freer after his long and hard struggle.

"What are you going to do with it?" asked the lawyer who acquainted him with his good luck.

"Buy a head," answered Freer.

"What kind of a head?" asked the lawyer, puzzled.

"A human head," said Freer.

"Whose?"

"Well, I used to own it, but it's Dr. Linscott's now. Still, I've always had a fondness for it, and I want to get it back."

"Pardon me," said the lawyer, solicitously, "but were you ever in an asylum?"

"Never."

"I suppose it's all right," remarked the lawyer, dubiously, "but this talk about buying a head when you already have one —"

"Oh, hang it all! a fellow likes to own the head he uses, doesn't he?"

"Of course. I never knew a man who didn't own his head."

"Well, you know one now," exclaimed Freer, irritably. "This isn't my head."

"No?"

"No. I have title only from the neck down."

"Then who is it talking to me?" demanded the lawyer.

Here was a new problem, and a startling one. The head was doing all the talking.

"Confound it!" cried Freer, "don't make this tangle any worse than it is now. I've had a year of it, and I'm nearly crazy."

"I believe you," said the lawyer, "but unfortunately I have no discretion in the matter of paying over this money. However, I'll give you a piece of advice: If you wish to retain your liberty, don't say anything to others about the loss of your head."

"Oh, that's all right," returned Freer. "I'll have it back within twenty-four hours."

"I hope so," said the lawyer, but he was very much tempted to send for an insanity expert, just the same.

The moment Freer had his money in bank he went to see Dr. Linscott.

"I want to buy back my head," he announced.

"*My* head," corrected the Doctor.

"Well, your head, then."

"Which one?" asked the Doctor.

"I'd like to buy the one I'm wearing, to use," returned Freer, bitterly, "and I'd like to buy the one you're wearing to play football with. It would give me great joy to try to kick a goal from the field with it."

"I don't believe I care to part with either," said the Doctor.

"Oh, come, now," urged Freer, "don't be miserly and selfish about it. Only a mighty mean man will hang on to two heads when there's a fellow in serious need of one of them. Just put a price on it."

"Only the constituted authorities are privileged to put a price on a man's head," asserted the Doctor. "And, besides, it would be such a loss to science. Why, the value of that head to science is incalculable."

"If you don't sell," threatened Freer, "I'll spend my $10,000 entirely on ocean travel."

"Heavens!" cried the Doctor, "if you should be drowned, the head would be lost."

"Exactly so," said Freer.

"Suppose I give you a life interest in the head," suggested the Doctor.

"I have that now."

"But I mean, free from all interference and criticism — to do with exactly as you see fit."

"Not at all satisfactory," said Freer. "I must have absolute title to the head. Custodianship won't answer, no matter how easy the terms may be. You can't appreciate the situation, because you've never been without a head, but I can't be contented unless I own it absolutely."

The Doctor was troubled. He didn't want to give up the head, and yet —

"My first ocean trip," Freer remarked, "will be from New York to San Francisco in a sailing vessel by way of Cape Horn."

"Can't we compromise this thing?" asked the Doctor. "I'll give you absolute title to the head, if you will bequeath it to me in your will and release me from all further payments."

"It will be wholly and entirely mine?"

"It will."

"You will have nothing to say about it during the term of my ownership?"

"Not a thing."

"Then I agree."

The Doctor breathed a sigh of relief, and so did Freer. Furthermore, the latter was so pleased that, as soon as the necessary papers had been drawn up and signed, he went back to see the lawyer.

"I have my own head now," he told him.

"It looks just like the other," asserted the lawyer.

"It is the other," said Freer, "but you seemed so troubled about the matter when I was here before that I thought I would come back and tell you that it's mine."

The lawyer puzzled over that problem for a long time, and he finally decided that it beat anything he ever found in a law book. But, if Freer's sanity ever should be questioned in court and the decision should rest upon the testimony of that lawyer, it would be a sorry day for Freer.

Miss Lucyanna's Eventful Day.*

BY ANNA NICHOLAS.

ONE who knew her well would have seen at once that Miss Lucyanna Prince lacked something of her customary serenity as she stood on her front steps that bright June morning. It was Sunday, too, when a more than common peacefulness was in order. Even the little Murphy girl, who had come in to stay during the hours of church service, and who did not know Miss Lucyanna so very well, realized that the lady was not following her usual routine when she came back the third time and told her in an absent-minded way just where to find Grandmother's sunbonnet in case she took a fancy to walk about in the yard.

"As if I had not waited on Grandmother every Sunday and some week-days for the last year," said the little Murphy girl to herself. "Miss Lucyanna's thinking about something else," she reflected shrewdly.

Whatever she was thinking of, it had not prevented her from arraying herself in the freshest and daintiest of summer attire. She had "done up" that blue lawn frock and the frilly white petticoat herself during the week, and had considered that if she was to wear them that season there could not be a more favorable opportunity than this very morning, so far as weather was concerned. She knew there were people in Raintown who thought that she dressed rather gay for her years, and who lifted their eyebrows at the pink roses on her new straw hat, but she couldn't help it if they did, she said, when she talked about it at home; she was going to wear clothes to please herself.

In talking over her affairs at home she was usually her only hearer. Ostensibly she addressed her remarks to Grandmother,

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $150 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending February 26, 1902.

but as Grandmother was extremely deaf, and was likely to be rambling in her replies when she was with difficulty made to hear, she served commonly as a sort of figure-head in conversations. Miss Lucyanna was not naturally a silent person, and had fallen into the fashion of thinking aloud in Grandmother's presence.

"It isn't quite so bad as talking to one's self," she thought, "for I can kind of make believe she hears, like the children do with their dolls. It looks more sociable, too, to be talking along than going about mum."

Nor was Miss Lucyanna so preoccupied that she could pass by her favorite rosebush without a glance.

"If I had time to go around by old Mis' Aikens's I'd take her a bunch, but I can't bear to pick them off and let them wilt, poor things, so I shan't take but one."

Having selected her flower she shut the stem in her hymn-book, for it was not customary in Raintown to wear roses pinned to the gown or thrust into the belt, and for Miss Lucyanna to do so would have been held to show unseemly coquettishness, or, as the neighbors would have put it, that she wished to attract attention.

Having raised her parasol and gathered the skirt of her blue gown so that it should not brush against the dusty dog-fennel that bordered the narrow sidewalk — Raintown did not yet boast a village-improvement society — Miss Prince proceeded leisurely on her way. It was a little early, but she wanted to go around by old Mr. Stevenson's and leave him her copy of last week's *Herald and Presbyter*.

"I don't find much in it that's interesting," she confessed, "but he sets store by it."

As she went along the absent-minded expression remained. So absorbed was she that she did not see Mrs. Casterline and her daughter Minnie, from over on the South pike, as they came driving in, though she seemed to be looking directly toward them, causing those ladies to remark sniffily a little later that Lucyanna Prince was getting too stuck up to know common folks, and creating a prolonged coolness that afterwards puzzled the innocent offender.

Mr. Stevenson's cottage was down by the railroad, and as she reached that neighborhood she found her way blocked by a long

freight train, with three empty passenger coaches attached to the rear. She waited for a little time, but as it did not move she decided that it would be necessary to walk to the end and go around it. If she hadn't had on her Sunday clothes, she reflected, as she passed along, she would have been tempted to crawl under one of those high freight cars. As it was, she found, when she came down toward the end, that she would have to climb over the steps and platform of one of the passenger coaches, for the end of the train was at the other side of a little bridge which she could not cross.

If her mind had not been intent on other things she would have noticed signs up in the other direction that the train was about to move. The conductor waved his arm toward a brakeman half-way along the string of cars, the locomotive bell rang, and the steam began to puff with increased energy. But Miss Lucyanna, heedless of these things, gathered her skirts up carefully, furled her parasol, removed her gray silk gloves, grasped the railing and mounted the platform.

At that very instant the thrill of movement went through the train, the cars bumped together, the wheels began to turn. It was a slow movement. Miss Lucyanna was nimble, and could have descended the opposite steps in safety, but, unfortunately, there, on the other side, was a ditch she had forgotten; to step down would be to drop into it. While she hesitated, and before the ditch was passed, the train had begun to move faster. Puff-puff, puff-puff, went the engine laboriously, but still with energy and as if equal to a swift pace. Before she fairly realized the situation, the train was going at good speed and the village was left behind.

In the first bewildered moment Miss Lucyanna's impulse was to jump off, without regard to risks; the next thought was to scream. She did neither of these things, being a self-controlled, sensible woman, and soon recovered her presence of mind.

"Well, of all things!" she said aloud, as if she had been addressing Grandmother. "I *am* in a fix. This train won't stop like enough before it gets to — why, it's Sunday morning, with no accommodation on and nothing but the noon express down, and that never stops at Raintown. I'll be twenty miles

from home, and how on earth I'll get back I don't know. But I can't help it, and I'll just have to wait and see what happens."

She turned to the car door behind her and found it locked. Then she braced herself against the end rail for what seemed a long time, when it occurred to her that she might spread the *Herald and Presbyter* on the step and sit down upon that without injury to her gown. At that moment a brakeman, running along the top of the freight car in front, caught sight of her, dropped easily down to where she was and looked at her in mute astonishment.

She explained her presence there, and after a moment's polite hesitation, he broke into gay, tumultuous laughter, in which Miss Lucyanna presently joined like a schoolgirl.

"But what am I to do?" she asked, after the brakeman had quieted down a little, and both had got their breath.

"Well," he replied, "I can get the train stopped right here in Oak Valley, five miles from anywhere, but I advise you to stay just where you are till we get to Liberty, and then take the noon train back."

"But I haven't any money to pay my fare, except ten cents I was going to put in the missionary collection, and the noon express doesn't stop at Raintown, anyway."

"That'll be all right," said the brakeman, easily. "I'll explain to our conductor, and he'll give you an order to be passed through free. Besides, I'll speak to the express conductor. Tell him we carried you off by mistake and the road owes it to you to get you back home. But come inside — or, what is better this fine June day, come out on the back platform and I'll get you a chair."

"What I'm thankful for," remarked Miss Lucyanna, as she seated herself in this place of vantage, "is that, so far as I know, not a person saw me carried off — the train was so far out in the edge of the village when I got on — and Jones's orchard was between me and the nearest house."

Just then the train slowed a little in crossing a bridge. As she glanced up casually, there, waiting in a buggy for the train to pass, were the man and woman who had been the

cause of her preoccupation that morning — Cousin Libbie Anderson and Mr. Amos Whitworth. At the instant she was engaged in animated conversation with the brakeman, who was a good-looking young man, "and not so particularly young either when you come to think of it," she had already reflected. He was gallantly kneeling at her feet, arranging the *Herald and Presbyter* as a protection for her dainty skirts from the grime of the platform. The couple in the vehicle were the last persons Miss Lucyanna wished to see at that time. She caught their look of surprise and what seemed to her also an expression of embarrassment, but there was no embarrassment on her face. She was equal to the emergency, and waved her hand to them gayly, as she swept by, and continued to wave it as long as she kept them in sight from the back platform.

But when the brakeman left her to attend to his duties she ceased to smile and a stern expression, not at all becoming, came to her face. She had talked the matter over that morning in Grandmother's presence before the little Murphy girl's arrival.

Amos Whitworth had, in the phraseology of the village, been "paying attention" to her for two years with a regularity that in the eyes of interested observers — which meant the eyes of nine-tenths of the people of the village — could only indicate the most serious matrimonial purpose. To her, his solicitous and deferential manner and his concentration of gaze signified even more than the regularity of his visits; but up to this time he had refrained from speaking plainly of his intentions. He had not asked her to be Mrs. Whitworth. Until recently, however, she had had no doubt but that he would do so when the right time came, though she was obliged to confess to herself that time, according to his clock, moved slowly.

This summer an element of uncertainty had entered into her dreams. Prosperity had brought about much activity in building in neighboring towns, particularly in Liberty, and demand for the product of Mr. Whitworth's brickyard had been brisk, necessitating his frequent absence from home. He had been much at Liberty and Cousin Libbie lived there. Cousin Libbie was a widow. She had known Amos Whitworth when they were young, and she took

pains to renew the acquaintance and to make time pass pleasantly for the gentleman in such hours of leisure as he might find while in her town. Rumor had it that he found many such hours, and that the lady entertained him so well that he was in danger of forgetting Miss Lucyanna.

The latter was not kept in the dark as to his doings. He was, of course, silent on the occasion of his calls upon her — less frequent now — or mentioned Mrs. Libbie in a casual way as one whom he had accidentally met; but there were officious "friends" who kept her posted.

"I don't need to be told," said Miss Lucyanna to Grandmother — or rather to herself — grimly. "Don't I know all of Lib's sly ways? Didn't I see her twenty years ago when she schemed and connived and palavered until she took Sam Anderson away from Mary Clark that he was actually engaged to? After he got his wits again I believe he regretted what he 'd done all his days. Oh, I know her. I wouldn't put anything apast her when she wants to gain a point, but I'd never have thought she'd go so far as to lie about my age. The outrageousness of her saying that I 'm forty-seven instead of thirty-six, and that she has the family Bible to show for it!"

Miss Lucyanna was not the first woman to have a sensitiveness on the subject of her age, but seldom is one as sorely tried as she had been in regard to this delicate matter.

Left to herself she would probably have been as reticent in regard to her years as other women past their youth, but circumstances had seemed to make entire frankness necessary. In the first place, she had been given to understand, not only by Amos Whitworth himself, but by his sister and by friends who thought they knew him well, that that upright person could not abide man, woman, or child who did not speak the truth, who even skimped the truth, who wilfully prevaricated in the smallest degree when a question of fact was involved.

"I don't tell lies myself and I won't put up with liars," said Amos, with an air of conscious virtue. Moreover, he had said on more than one occasion in Miss Lucyanna's presence that he had no patience with any person who was touchy on the matter of age. He was willing to tell the truth and let everybody

know he was forty-one on the seventeenth of last September, and he couldn't see why any one should be silly enough not to do the same. Years were no disgrace.

Even after this, Miss Lucyanna might have kept silence on the subject had it not been for Grandmother, who was really something of a trial since her hearing had failed and her mind had gone wandering into dim, strange by-paths, whence it never again could find its way until a heavenly dawn should bring the light. In Grandmother's earlier days she had been as discreet as one could wish on the subject of ages, but now, it was quite the reverse. She was much given to discoursing garrulously in regard to the years of her descendants, but alas, as poor Lucyanna found, her memory was not trustworthy.

"Lucyanna, you know," she would say with an alert and positive air to the interested neighbor who might happen in, "Lucyanna will be forty-seven in February. I remember that the day she was born was the coldest one of the winter — seventeen degrees below zero," and the old lady would ramble amiably on, while poor Lucyanna would explain with a forced laugh that Grandmother had got her mixed up with Sister Sarah and made her out ten years older than she was, not wholly convincing the neighbor, however, as she knew very well. The visitor would go away and say wherever she happened to call next that Grandmother must be right. Old folks remembered things away back so accurately. And as Lucyanna had been born in another State there was no one in the village to speak in her behalf.

Thus it had come about that she had mentioned her exact years to Amos. She did not want him to get the idea that she was forty-seven, and she thought he would certainly take her word, for she had never deceived him in any way. Of course he ought to know by her looks, she thought, that she was not as old as Grandmother said, "but men are so stupid about some things you never can tell," she had added.

Now another complication had come in, another element working against her peace of mind. Cousin Libbie had been visiting old friends in and about Raintown, among them Amos's sister out on the Oak Hill road. She had spent a day with Lucyanna, for they were outwardly on the friendliest of terms. Grandmother

belonged to Lucyanna on her mother's side of the house and was not related to Libbie, so she had no memories of the latter's birth. She did regale the visitor, however, with her recollections of the cold day on which Lucyanna came into the world, forty-seven years before.

After this visit word came back to Lucyanna that Libbie had spoken of the accuracy of Grandmother's memory, and had mentioned that the Prince-family Bible in her own possession showed that the old lady recalled the date of Lucyanna's birth perfectly.

The ownership of that Bible had been a sore point with Lucyanna. "It belongs to me by rights," she had said more than once to Libbie herself. "My father was the oldest son and I'm his only living child, so I ought to have it."

But Libbie would not give it up, saying that Grandpa had personally given it to her, and she meant to keep it. She kept it on the highest shelf of her sitting-room cupboard, behind locked glass doors, as Lucyanna had noticed on her occasional visits to the home in Liberty.

It was this reprehensible conduct of Libbie's that had occasioned Miss Lucyanna's mental disturbance that morning, and had indirectly been the cause of her being carried off by the train. It was this that she was thinking over as she went along, unmindful of the beautiful June landscape spread out before her.

"Of course, if she 's told that about me she's made herself out younger than she is. She 's the one that's forty-seven, and of course she knows Amos wouldn't want to marry a woman older than himself; and so I don't doubt she's told him she's thirty-six, and has the Bible to prove it. She's capable of it. If lying will do it, I s'pose she 'll get him, and if he hasn't any better sense I 'm sure she 's welcome to him; but I should like to have him know that I told the truth about my age. — No, she isn't welcome to him either," she hastily amended. "I want him myself. He belongs to me. He likes me and I ought to have him."

As she acknowledged afterwards in telling the story to Grandmother, who never heard a word of it, she would have broken down crying at that moment, if a sudden daring thought had not electrified her and driven tears away.

The train was approaching Liberty. She looked at her watch. It would be twenty minutes or more before the express arrived. Cousin Libbie's house was only two squares from the station. She would have plenty of time. Yes, she would try it. The freight rolled lumberingly on to the side track and stopped. The polite brakeman was on hand to assist her to alight and to make her known to the conductor, with whom she joined in a laugh over her unexpected journey. Then she took her way up the street. Liberty, like Raintown, was a church-going community. Few persons were to be seen, and houses had a deserted look. Arrived at Cousin Libbie's residence she found that also closed, as she expected.

"Nanny sings in the choir, and of course she 'll be gone," she had thought before she left the train, "and little Emmy will be with her, it 's likely."

Evidently this was the case; also it was what she wished. Up on the porch she went, down to the door-mat she stooped, and from under it took the door-key. It was a matter of course that the key should be there. It is the way of all women to put keys under door-mats.

She went in and, behold! — also as she had hoped — the key of the glass cupboard was in the door. She stood on a chair and took down the precious family Bible, wrapped it carefully in the useful *Herald and Presbyter*, which she had removed from the car platform and preserved. Then she wrote a hasty note on a scrap of paper, telling Nanny that she had borrowed the Bible for a few days and would return it. She regretted that she did not have time to stay and see her, and left her love. Then she went out and locked the door, restored the key to its place under the mat, and started toward the station. At the gate she encountered a neighbor whom she had met on former visits — a woman moved, she suspected, by curiosity as to her errand. She was equal to the occasion.

"I am here quite accidentally," she said, civilly, accounting for herself in a plausible way, "but thought I might as well attend to a long-delayed duty and, while Cousin Libbie is over at Raintown, take the Bible and make some entries in it that have been neglected."

"There," she said, as she went on, "I am afraid Amos wouldn't consider that truthful. It gave the idea to Mrs. Jones that Libbie wanted the Bible taken over."

There was no trouble about the return trip. Miss Lucyanna's eyes were very bright and her cheeks very pink with the excitement of her adventure. Other passengers looked at her with admiration, and the conductor, who proved to be an old acquaintance, stopped at her seat and indulged in some pleasantries concerning her morning's trip — "made talk," as Grandmother would have said, because of her brightness of face and freshness of attire, the blue lawn being yet scarcely crumpled, and the rose in her hymn-book not withered. On her absorbed way out on the freight train, Miss Lucyanna had scarcely noted the charm of the June morning. Now the beauty of the golden day was suddenly borne in upon her. The fields and forests in the height of their summer glory were a delight to her eyes; the fragrance of the clover swept in at the open windows like a balm. She was elate and triumphant in spite of the heartache because of the defection of Amos. And she had just committed a burglary! It was nothing else, for she knew Libbie would never have allowed her to take the book out of the house. She had stolen the Bible — and she was glad of it!

She could not escape all observation when she left the car. The unusual fact of the stopping of this particular train itself excited attention, and when she alighted with much unnecessary assistance from the conductor, there were stares of surprise from villagers who did not know she had been away and felt aggrieved that they had not been informed. Among those who chanced to see her arrival was Amos Whitworth, from his window in the little hotel across the street.

His Sunday-evening visits, once a matter of course, had been irregular of late; but somehow, in spite of that morning drive with the widow, Miss Lucyanna felt that he would be around that night. She knew Amos well enough to be sure that curiosity as to her trip would bring him, if nothing else. She seldom left home and he knew she would not stay long away from Grandmother. So, when supper was over, the Murphy girl gone home, and Grandmother put to bed like the child that she was,

Miss Lucyanna seated herself expectantly in one of the two rocking-chairs on the little porch. Before this she had lighted the lamp on the centre-table in the parlor, and under it had opened the borrowed Bible at the family record. While handling the book she made an unexpected discovery. Out from its pages fell a letter addressed to Mrs. Libbie Anderson in the bold hand of Amos Whitworth. To say that the sight of it did not give Miss Lucyanna a fresh pang would not be true. And it would be useless to deny that her first impulse was to take the missive from the envelope and read it. But she resisted temptation.

"No; I am going to be able to say to him truthfully, if the subject comes up this evening, that I have not read it," and she laid it down on the open pages of the family record.

"But I wonder," she said in the unheeding ears of Grandmother, as she tucked her into bed, "Oh, I wonder what he could have said that would make Libbie lay the letter away in the Bible."

As twilight deepened she heard Mr. Whitworth's heavy tread while he was yet a good way off. A woman's ears are keen to distinguish the footsteps of her chosen one, even from among many.

If the caller expected to be chided for his recent neglect or reproached for his attentions to another woman, his apprehension was speedily relieved. Miss Lucyanna greeted him with her accustomed cordiality, began to chat in her usual cheerful way, and was soon telling him the story of her unpremeditated journey over to Liberty.

"I was hoping," she said, laughing, "to get back without any one seeing me or knowing about the ridiculous affair, and when I glanced up and saw you and Cousin Libbie there, looking so surprised, I was provoked that you had to happen along just at that particular minute. It was funny that you did, wasn't it?"

Mr. Whitworth drew a long breath of relief at this point. He had felt that he should have to say something about that drive and hardly knew how to introduce the subject, but here she had opened the way herself. He was not quite sure that he

liked her ignoring of his long absence — it seemed to savor of indifference — but he was glad she did not cherish any "feeling" in regard to Libbie. It made the process of smoothing things over so much easier for him, he thought; not knowing, foolish man, that it is not the woman who indulges in loud reproaches and scoldings who carries the keenest weapons of defense — and offense.

"Yes;" he said, "we did wonder how you happened to be on that freight and where you were going. Libbie," he went on with clumsy elaboration, shifting his feet in the effort to speak carelessly, "Libbie, who has been visiting Sister Jane, you know, wanted to go to Oak Hill Methodist meeting this morning, so, to oblige Jane, I took her over."

"'To oblige Jane,' indeed!" thought Miss Lucyanna, scornfully, but she went on placidly with her story.

"And in spite of the first scare and worry at getting carried off by the train, I must say that I really enjoyed the trip, going and coming — especially coming, for Tom Mason, the conductor, was an old schoolmate that I hadn't met for years and it was so nice to see him. His wife, who is dead now, was a friend of mine, too. He said he'd heard that I was living here, and he'd been planning to stop off and hunt me up, and would be sure to come now that he'd seen me."

Miss Lucyanna in the dusk could not see Amos Whitworth's face distinctly, but she knew without looking that he frowned heavily at this innocent remark.

"As long as I was over at Liberty," she went on, "I thought it would be a good time to borrow the family Bible, which was up at Libbie's, and bring it home to make the missing entries. They've been neglected so long. Brother William's and Sister Sarah's deaths have never been set down there, nor the record of William's children. I have all the dates, and if you'd just as soon, I'll get you to write them. Your handwriting's so much better than mine, and I never could manage parchment very well."

"By the way," she added, sweetly, "if you should happen to be writing to Libbie soon, just tell her, please, that I'll send the Bible back next week. She may not find the note I left on the table."

Amos looked around at her with a somewhat startled expression,

"Me write to Libbie!" he exclaimed, after a moment's hesitation. "What should I write to her for? What should I write to any woman for, except you?" adding gallantly, and with returning self-confidence, "Why, I haven't written a letter to any other lady for years."

"Oh," returned Miss Lucyanna, "is that so? I just thought if you were writing it would save me the trouble. But suppose we go in and make those entries now."

"There isn't much room to spare in the birth columns, so you may as well put the names of William's children down under my record, and she placed her finger on the spot where, in her grandfather's clear, old-fashioned hand, was the inscription, "Lucyanna, daughter of etc., born May 10, 1865."

Mr. Whitworth read it with interest, and remarked, meditatively, "Just past thirty-six — h'm. Libbie said — yes — h'm! Is her record in here?"

He was about to turn back the pages, but Lucyanna put her hand on them.

"Never mind looking there, Amos," she said, gently. "Of course, I don't mind telling my age, but Libbie's particular about hers, and it wouldn't be quite fair. This way is the record of deaths," and she opened the book at a page whereon lay the letter addressed to Libbie in Amos's unmistakable hand.

It was the moment of Lucyanna's triumph. She had proved to him that she had told the truth about her own age; she had proved to him that Libbie had not told the truth about it; and she had caught him — the stickler for truth — in a "whopper."

It was also a moment of silence. Amos was too disconcerted to know what to say, and Lucyanna had no occasion for speech.

Presently he rallied a little and looked at her shamefacedly and helplessly.

"A man can make a darned fool of himself sometimes, Lucyanna," he stammered. "It was the only time and, by George, the last time — and — and — you mustn't mind anything in that letter."

"Why, Amos Whitworth! you don't think I'd read a letter that wasn't intended for me, do you? I haven't read a word of it. 'Let you have it.' Certainly not. It's Libbie's letter, and must go back to her just as I found it."

She spoke in a tone of such earnestness and firmness that Amos was forced to believe her. In an endeavor to appear unconcerned he smiled in a sickly and feeble way, realizing too well that in addition to having lied he had betrayed guilt by an unnecessary display of anxiety about the letter.

He went on silently setting down the births of William's children and the deaths of William and Sarah in the family record, but his penmanship lacked something of its accustomed firmness and regularity. He was plainly nervous and embarrassed, but he was thinking hard, and presently he rallied again and rose nobly superior to adverse conditions.

More than one thing had happened that day to make him feel that he had not been valuing Miss Lucyanna at her true worth, and that she was a prize that might slip away. "She had looked mighty young and pretty as she sat there on the platform of the car, with that fresh young cub of a brakeman monkeying around waiting on her," he had reflected. As for Tom Mason stopping off and visiting her, he'd see about that.

"Lucyanna," he said, without preliminaries, "I think we've been keeping company long enough to come to an understanding. Let's get married — and right away, too. Say yes, do!"

He spoke in a pleading voice and a humble tone, which an hour before he would not have used, but, manlike, he ignored unpleasantness and made no allusion to his duplicity or the possibility that another woman could have intervened.

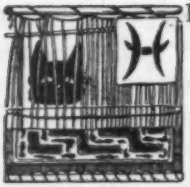
Being wise in her generation, Miss Lucyanna also ignored what had happened. She could afford to do so. The inning was hers.

She was not immediately responsive, so she told Grandmother next day, but that her answer was finally favorable was indicated by the fact that Mr. Whitworth stayed so late that evening that the wakeful and observant neighbor across the street was quite scandalized. Also, he went his way whistling a merry tune.

A few days later she intrusted the Bible to him to carry to Cousin Libbie, as he happened to have business over at Liberty. Whether or not he extracted the letter from its protecting pages before delivery of the book she never inquired. Neither did he ask her if she had read it in the later period of possession. He did not dare. If Miss Lucyanna did allow curiosity as to what he had said to Libbie to get the better of her she never confessed it to any one but Grandmother, and Grandmother never told.

Wanted — A Snake-Charmer.*

BY WARD WINCHELL, U. S. N.



HE was a graduated Midshipman, out of Annapolis long enough to just begin to suspect that there might be, somewhere in the world, a Commanding Officer who knew as much as he about things in general, and how a ship should be run, in particular.

It had been his rare good fortune to take part in that Sunday morning target practice at Manila, on the ever memorable First of May — Spain's moving day. He did not get the idea that he was a hero, until the home papers began to arrive, months afterwards; but when he caught the idea he took it violently.

Later on, with the rest of the navy, he had "assisted" in the assault on Manila, by hammering the old stone fort at Malate. While the heavy guns had played their deep diapason of war, he had performed a staccato solo on a little machine gun mounted in the bow of a captured Spanish steam-launch. The volunteer army so covered itself with a mixture of swamp mud, mosquito bites and glory, that a great flock of promotions for valor flew out of Washington desks, and lit in all kinds of unexpected if well-deserved places.

After this experience our hero was frequently heard to say with envy, "Every time the Navy does anything, the Army gets ten new Brigadier Generals."

But he did not originate this — it was a quotation from some older navy pessimist.

In the weary months of inaction after Manila's fall and before our "benevolent assimilation," he used to drop in at the Alhambra, to listen to the Filipino band, and talk over the late unpleasantness with polite Spanish officers, — meanwhile helping them spoil their livers with adulterated American beer, and posing to his

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own satisfaction as a magnanimous conqueror who bore no malice toward a fallen but worthy foe.

To further add to the good opinion he had of himself, he had talked with Aguinaldo as man to man; knew the electrical vibrations of Admiral Dewey's voice when the "Old Man" was getting a move on things, and had seen an Army General in pajamas. And if these were not honors enough for a midshipman, he could point out to you the mistakes of the Army, just like any old naval officer, who has accustomed himself by a long course of training to see motes without going to the trouble of first removing beams, — a bit of weakness Adam invented.

One day, somebody possessed with a puissant pen, and sitting in a swivel chair at a Washington desk, wrote an illegible signature at the bottom of a bit of type-written stuff. Straightway words flashed across continents and dove under seas, and the ship our hero honored with his presence began making her homeward-bound pennant, and, a week later, flung it to the breeze, and started on a thirteen-thousand-mile journey to New York.

The good news came to far-off homes on the other side of the earth and gladdened the hearts of wives and would-be wives, who thereupon began planning new dresses and other things useful in re-enslaving returning heroes. And pretty heads puzzled over long-forgotten geographical distances, and dainty hands scratched days off the calendar with feverish feminine anticipation.

We shall spare the reader the details of that long trip home. Nor shall we tell how our hero bought sea shells at Singapore, which had not been cleaned, and which scented up his room with an "ancient and fish-like" smell compared with which Trinculo's monster would have been heliotrope. Neither shall we reveal the details of his encounter with a shark, — not the sea kind but a land variety, — a Singhalese street-hawker, who wore long hair, a tortoise-shell comb and a white dress, and who looked like a bearded lady, but had withal such a voice of piratical persuasion that he sold our hero a genuine cat's eye for $5 after many feminine tears and reluctant descents from his original price of $50. Nor is it meet that we should mention the strong words our hero said the next day when he found his purchase to be only a bit of

polished sea shell which could be duplicated at any reputable store at rupees three a hundred.

"One cannot cut wisdom teeth without paying for them," was the heartless way the situation was summed up in the Junior Officers' mess.

It is enough to say that, by the time the ship reached Bombay, our hero had been fleeced so often he really felt quite knowing. Having gone half way around the world, he knew the difference between a Yokohama "rickshaw" and a Hong Kong "sampan"; had drunk "stingas" at the Singapore Club; bought a sapphire at Colombo, a pigeon-blood ruby at Bombay, and now he was feigning that his healthy young stomach liked hot curry and "Bombay duck" for tiffin.

He had also added to his experience by looking at the Parsee Towers of Silence, where the dead are lain in rows to be eaten by buzzards, and had seen a Hindoo plague corpse reduced to a handful of ashes sifting through a burning woodpile, and, with an eye to detail, had noted that the smoke smelled only of sandal wood.

But with all these experiences, he was still unsatisfied. It will be recalled that Alexander suffered from the same complaint.

India is, above all other places, the land of strange adventures. Now that he was there, our hero longed to kill a tiger or have an adventure with a cobra.

He was not at all modest about these ambitions. Indeed, he so abused a young man's privilege of talking about himself that all his messmates became experts on killing snakes and tigers. At last, after much vain wishing, he had his adventure with a cobra, and it happened in this wise:

He and a few messmates had put up at a hotel some distance from Bombay. After dinner there was a dance in honor of the heroes from Manila.

He had a waltz with an English girl who did not consider it good form to reverse. She was not interested in Manila, knew little about tiger slaying and less about cobras, and all these limitations, being combined in one girl, made him tired. Then, too, she was dark and small and he liked them blonde and big;—and she had the big projecting teeth that the caricaturists of all Gaul consider typical of the daughters of John Bull.

They parted with mutual satisfaction, she going to her chaperon and he sauntering over the grass of the compound to a secluded spot where a reclining wicker chair invited repose. Lying back in this and lighting a Manila perfecto, he gave himself up to the pleasing delight of passing in mental review all the girls he had ever loved. As he was two and twenty, behind him stretched a long line of experience with broken hearts for mile-stones.

Lulled by the mellow music and soothed by the cigar, he must have dozed, for he failed to notice a stealthy rustle in the grass under his chair, and was undisturbed by the motions of the long, slender thing that glided this way and that in the grass, and curled itself into sinuous, graceful folds.

With a start, he awoke from an ugly dream in which a cobra had coiled on his chest.

In the dark he could not recall for a moment where he was. Then the distant lights and the music brought it all back. He lazily stretched and rubbed his hand down his vest buttons to reassure himself that the dream was but a dream. Swinging around, he rose to a sitting position and, still stretching and gaping, he brought his right foot down on the grass.

Horrors! It rested on something that squirmed and wriggled — a snake! Undoubtedly a cobra, and he was stepping on it! Then he did a bold thing. The snake had not struck, hence his foot must be on either the head or the neck, and so, despite the suddenness of the shock, he bore down with all his weight. The soles of his dancing pumps were thin, and under the instep he could feel the snake straining this way and that in strong efforts to free itself, but so long as he could hold it he was safe.

It is a hard job to stand on a squirming snake in the dark, and it showed no symptoms of dying, but seemed to get more desperately lively the harder he pushed it down into the soft grass. If he could but get his other heel on its head, perhaps he could crush the life out of it; at any rate he could hold it better. But on which side of his foot was that wicked head with the wide hood?

The night was so dark and the grass so long, he could see nothing, peer as he would.

He stamped savagely down with the left foot close to the right one, carefully keeping all his weight on the squirming neck. Ah!

Something was there which mashed, but whether head or body, he could not tell. Extending his foot further to the left, he stamped again; evidently the body extended to the left.

By inches he pounded and mashed and ground the body into the grass as far to the left as he could reach without lifting his weight from the right foot on the neck. Evidently it was a big snake, and the head with its deadly venom was to the right.

If he could only twist his left foot far enough around to mash that head! One can do this nice balancing feat in the gymnasium, but to be treading in the dark on slippery death, and then attempt it, — that's quite another matter. Something had to be done soon, for the cobra was exerting more and more force. It seemed to be growing stronger, despite the injuries he had inflicted — or was he growing weaker?

But what was that? Oh, blessed sound! The growling and half-suppressed barking of a dog under the chair! It had seen the cobra and was attacking it! He eagerly urged on his new ally with all his powers of canine persuasion, but it seemed loth to attack and remained snarling and growling under the chair. Perhaps it was a native dog and understood only Hindustani. Hoping against hope, he continued encouraging it by sounds which under ordinary circumstances would nerve a timid cur to spit in the face of a bulldog.

Things were come to a desperate pass now, for as soon as the dog had made himself heard, the snake had put forth a supreme effort and had succeeded in slipping a bit to the right. It was but a question of time when it would be free. Press how he would, it was getting loose. Already an inch or so had slipped away, and at any moment the head might be so freed as to be able to turn and strike death into his veins.

Even as this thought struck him, he felt more of it slipping. Making a quick backward spring, he reached the seat of the chair, and standing there with every nerve thrilling, he heard the released cobra glide through the grass toward the dog, which at once stopped growling and became ominously silent. Was it possible that the snake had killed it so quickly? He bent over, listening and vainly trying to peer through the thick darkness. Then a happy thought came — the matches in his pocket.

The box was almost empty. In his haste and nervousness, he broke the first two. Cursing the modern commercial instinct that leads the Japanese to imitate European manufactures in all things save quality, he lighted one by one the four remaining "Saker-hets-Tandstickors made in Kobe." They went out immediately.

The burning head flew off one, however, and by its fitful glare he had a vision of the dog lying near the foot of the chair, with the snake coiled around its neck. Knowing that the cobra is not a constrictor and not likely to coil around the neck of its victim, he distrusted this fleeting vision as an optical delusion.

For a long while he stood on the chair, trying to make up his mind to make a jump and run for the hotel, but the way led through the grass, and where there was one cobra it was likely there were more. Besides, he was unnerved. Let any one stand on slippery death for ten minutes and note the effect on the nerves.

But one thing remained to do — he must call for help.

. . . . . .

A few minutes later three of his messmates had started for him, armed with such improvised weapons as could be hastily secured. "Bring a light," yelled the afflicted one, and an ornamental Chinese lantern was taken from the piazza decorations.

"What's the matter, Charlie," said number one, "Has your cigar gone out?"

"Be careful! There's a cobra right under this chair. He killed a dog there just a minute ago."

"Nonsense," said number two, swinging the lantern under the chair. "Here's a pup, sure enough, but he's a mighty lively corpse judging by the way he's chewing on that rope. What have you been drinking, anyhow?"

"Oh, I didn't *see* him. I stepped on him right here. Look where I mashed him into the grass."

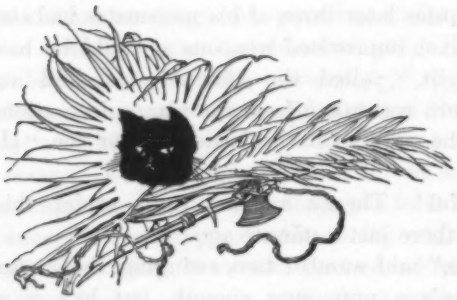
They looked. Then number three picked up the native rope with which the pup was tied to the chair. It was loosely woven fibre, thick, soft, and with sundry flat places mashed into it where Charlie's heel had dug fiercely into its soft texture. "There's your cobra," said he, fitting it into its print on the grass.

. . . . . .

A few moments later, four young naval heroes lined up at the bar, where some warm champagne was broached at rupees ten the bottle. Over the drink and in consideration therefor, they swore eternal secrecy.

"Charlie," said one, solemnly, as he drank, "You've got to do one of two things. Either swear off, or buy a mongoose."

"There's still another solution," said number two. "What's the matter with his marrying a snake-charmer?"



The Managing of Obed.*

BY CHAPIN HOWARD, JR.

MRS. TUTTLE sat rigidly upright in the familiar rocking-chair in the kitchen. Her hands were clasped tightly in her lap, and upon her face, framed by the limp, velvet bonnet-strings, there was an expression almost of terror as she gazed across at the tall old clock in the corner by the mantelpiece. She remembered her first glimpse of it, thirty years ago, on the day her husband brought her to the farm, a bride. She had stood in the doorway, in her wedding gown, her glance traveling shyly about the unfamiliar room, while the clock stared back at her with its pallid, expressionless old face. From the same corner it had watched and ticked away the years while she had faded from a pretty, sweet-faced girl into a plain, unlovely woman, old before her time. Her jailor, she had called it sometimes, in the only words of revolt that ever crossed her lips, and she came back to it now with the feeling of a prisoner thrust back into the cell from which he has escaped.

She had been to the city for three days with her husband, Obed Tuttle, to visit their married daughter, Emeline, and they had come home on the stage that afternoon.

It was the first time Mrs. Tuttle had been away from the farm over night in more than fifteen years, and the simple luxury of her daughter's home came to her as a revelation. The rugs, the polished floors, the snowy, flower-strewn tablecloth, sparkling with glass and silver in the rose-shaded candle-light, the watchful, attentive maid — every detail had appealed to the starved senses of the older woman with a comfort that was almost physical.

That first night at dinner Emeline had told her she looked tired and over-worked—that it was a shame, since he could afford it, that her father didn't hire a girl. And her husband, a grave-man-

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nered young doctor, had looked up abstractedly and added that he had read somewhere that nearly thirty per cent. of the women in the insane asylum were farmers' wives. Obed had gone on pouring his tea into his saucer as if he had not heard, but Mrs. Tuttle had stared at her son-in-law for several minutes with frightened, faded eyes.

The words had seemed to hold for her a strange significance. The lean, hard-worked little woman had never considered the possibility of breaking down. The work of the farm, after the creamery was added, had grown harder with every year, but she had never complained — it kept her from feeling lonely since the children had grown up and gone away.

As she sat in the twilight in her shabby, turned black silk, listening to the ticking of the clock, she thought of the future with a kind of helpless terror. She could not always go on slaving so. Obed would think it was a foolish expense, but she needed someone to help about the harder work. There were no longer the children to think of now, and they could afford to relax the hoarding and self-denial of a life-time.

She rose nervously and lit the lamp. Then she took off her bonnet and set about preparing supper with trembling hands. She knew that she must speak while the sense of her freedom was still upon her — before they had settled back into the familiar routine against which it would be useless for her to struggle.

But it was not until the supper dishes had been cleared away and her husband, having finished the evening chores, had sat down to read his weekly paper in the circle of lamplight by the table, that she found the courage which she sought. She was standing at the sink, and she spoke without looking around:

"Had you thought anything of what Emeline said about a girl?"

He paid no attention, and she wondered if he had not heard.

"Obed," she insisted, "Emeline said she thought — now you could afford it — you ought to hire a girl."

The paper moved impatiently. "I guess we've always managed," he said. "I don't see no reason fur changin' now."

Mrs. Tuttle drew in her breath sharply. For a long time she stood looking fixedly at the dish she had been washing. Her spare figure in its shabby black dress was tense.

"It's men like you, Obed," she broke out, "who help fill them asylums up with farmers' wives. I've worked and slaved for you in this kitchen all my life, and you've been gettin' meaner an' meaner every year. If you should ever die," she went on breathlessly, "I've got the text for your funeral sermon all picked out. It's in the forty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, the fourth verse. I've had it marked in my Bible more'n twenty years."

She closed her lips tightly, as if frightened at her own daring and, turning back to the sink, went on quietly with her work.

Half an hour later, when she had gone up the creaking stairs to the north bedroom, her husband laid down his paper and listened. Then he got up cautiously and, crossing over to the mantel, took down the worn Bible. There was a book-mark worked on perforated cardboard at the forty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, and the verse was marked with a double line of faded penciling: "Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass."

It was nearly a week later that Obed first noticed that his wife was acting queerly. He came in to breakfast one morning after the chores were done, and found she had brought her rocking-chair out on to the back porch. She sat with her hands folded idly in her lap, rocking gently to and fro.

"Why, what's the matter, Ma?" he asked, stopping in the middle of the path, milk-pail in hand. "Ain't you feelin' well?"

"No," she answered, looking dreamily out across the fields, "No, I'm just restin'. It's lovely, ain't it, this time o' year? I've always said the fall was the time fur me. Breakfast is ready, but I guess I'll just set out here — an' rest."

Obed went in, bewildered, to a solitary meal, and all the while he ate he watched his wife furtively through the open door.

For the next few days he noticed nothing out of the ordinary, except that he often caught her staring at him intently, and frequently the table was badly set.

One noon the dinner-bell summoned him as usual from the field. He came home wearily and washed up at the pump outside. Then he entered the kitchen, and stood staring. The table was spread with the customary red tablecloth. It was covered with pies. There was nothing else. Apple, pumpkin, mince and squash

stared back at him. Mrs. Tuttle was cutting large pieces from each and heaping them lavishly upon a plate.

"I thought I'd have just what you liked to-day," she said, smiling up at him as she stood back to survey her work.

Her husband stared at her in dumb bewilderment. There was a look of absolute terror in his eyes.

"I don't want no pie!" he stammered.

"Why, Obed!" she said, reproachfully, "you always liked my pies. I've made a lot of 'em. I guess" — looking at him wistfully — "I've made enough to reach from here to the asylum."

He turned and left the room, his teeth chattering.

That night at two o'clock he was awakened by the sound of someone moving about in the kitchen downstairs. His wife was gone from his side. He sat up in bed and listened. The sound had ceased, and an uncanny stillness filled the house. He got cautiously out of bed and slipped on his clothes. Then he groped his way to the head of the back stairs and listened. The door at the foot was unlatched, showing a faint streak of light. There was the sound of something being dragged across the kitchen floor. Obed shivered a little, and then began to grope his way down, one step at a time. When he reached the bottom he pushed the door open cautiously and peered into the kitchen, blinking a little at the light. There was a small hand-lamp on the table, and in the centre of the kitchen floor knelt Mrs. Tuttle. Her blue-checked apron and calico skirt were pinned up about her knees, and on the floor beside her was a pail of water. Her sparse, black hair was drawn tightly back and fastened in a small knot by large, plainly-visibly hair-pins. A few stray wisps had escaped and hung against her shrunken cheeks. She had paused to wring out her cloth, and her eyes, fixed on the blank space of the opposite wall, had the glassy stare of a sleep-walker. On one of her thin, work-worn hands gleamed her wedding ring.

"Ma!" said Obed, in an awed voice. "Why, Ma!"

He stepped cautiously into the room and picked his way gingerly across to her, between the puddles. She seemed not to know that he was there, but shook out her cloth and, leaning forward on one hand, began to mop the floor.

He touched her shoulder. "Ma," he said, "be you awake?"

She paid no attention, but went on steadily with her work, her arm moving in large half-circles. He stood looking down at her for several minutes. His jaw dropped. Then he moved quietly across to the table and took up the lamp. He came back and stood beside her. She looked very worn and frail as she knelt there on the floor at his feet, the lamp-light making a blurred circle around her on the wet boards. He stood looking down at her for a long time, while his hard, stubborn face began to work. But he said nothing. Mrs. Tuttle mopped the entire floor, moving about on her knees and dragging the pail after her. Then she began again.

"Ain't you gettin' tired, Ma?" he asked gently.

Mrs. Tuttle stared straight in front of her.

"I want ter leave the house lookin' neat when I start fur the asylum," she said mechanically.

He leaned forward. His hand shook, but he held the lamp so that the light shone full upon her face. It was set like flint.

"You ain't goin' ter the asylum, Ma," he said, soothingly, as one speaking to a child. "You go upstairs and go ter bed. I'll get Milly Pettingill in the morning. She can stay here right along and do the work. You ain't a-goin' ter the asylum—" his voice broke.

Mrs. Tuttle did not move for several minutes. Then, with a sigh, she rose slowly to her feet and, taking up the pail, walked unsteadily across the kitchen to the sink. She dried her hands on her blue-checked apron and hung it carefully upon a chair by the stove. Then she went quietly upstairs.

A fortnight later Mrs. Tuttle was sitting on her back porch after dinner, rocking placidly to and fro. From the kitchen came the reckless clatter of dishes and the shrill tones of a girl's voice singing. Mrs. Tuttle smiled uncertainly.

"I guess she's breakin' about everything I've got. But I ain't worryin'. No," she went on, her glance straying idly out across the fields, golden in the autumn sunshine, "No, I'm just restin', an' it's about time I begun. I'll have to tell Obed sometime, I suppose, but"—a quizzical look stole into her faded eyes—"that night I got up an' mopped the kitchen floor at two o'clock with him standin' by holdin' of the lamp—well, it's the first real hilarious time I've had in thirty years!"

The Husband of the Organist.*

BY VIRGINIA M. CORNELL.

JOHN TRENTON was at first sight an insignificant-looking man, with hair and beard of no particular color. He was a self-made man who, from an orphaned country boy, had risen by arduous struggles to be a city man of affluence; but, unlike most of those who have made themselves, he had never been quite satisfied with his handiwork. Notwithstanding its munificent rewards, he felt in the bustling business world a lack of that harmony which had filled his boyish soul at the whispering of the trees and the murmur of the brook in those days when everything in nature made for him inexpressible music.

It is possible that he might have been better satisfied with his achievements had it not been for a feeling he had always had that, in taking up the struggle for wealth, he had left something, the struggle for which would have been, to him, more worth while. He had never discovered exactly what this was, but he was conscious of its existence.

In the course of years, John Trenton, the successful man of business, with harmony hidden in his soul, married the organist of St. Alban's Cathedral, a woman with harmony always at her fingers' ends. She was one of those strikingly ethereal-looking women who, nine times out of ten, receive more of some man's devotion than they deserve, and Mrs. Trenton was not the exception to prove this rule. She had been no more than a comfortably poor girl when he married her. Her marriage, indeed, had been to her but an avenue of escape from that poverty, for he was not a man she would have dreamed of marrying otherwise. Had she married for love, it is quite possible that she might have been more than an ordinarily loving woman; but, married without it,

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she had never been able to forgive John Trenton the fact that he had not been able to inspire love in her.

But since he had not, she wrapped herself in her one earthly joy, the sounds she evoked from her organ. Under their spell, her eyes glowed and her pulses thrilled as they never did to her husband's voice or touch, nor, it is but just to her to add, to the voice or touch of any other man. If she had a yearning for that greater and more satisfying emotion — love — though she looked at John Trenton with hopeless eyes, she looked at no other.

He came gradually to look at her also with hopeless eyes, but in a different sense. She still seemed to him the living embodiment of all perfection. He had felt immediately after the ceremony which had made them man and wife that there was not room enough in the earth, nor in the waters under it, to contain his happiness and exaltation. Afterwards something rose like a sob in his throat when he thought of that moment.

A few months after their marriage they went to Europe, where she could better satisfy the cravings of that passion which, while not for himself, was yet, he felt, a tie between them. Not only because that, save for him, such opportunity might have always been lacking to her, but because sometimes he thought that he really did understand her music. As it absorbed her more and more, her playing grew to him more wonderful and divine. He could not renounce the pleasure of watching her fingers as they moved over the keys, and he had sometimes a sudden, intense desire to sit at her place at the organ, and feel it obey his touch at it did hers. Once, indeed, when she had left the room, he laid his hands upon the keyboard, and a sudden, flashing insight came to him of the joy of pressing the keys upon which his hands inertly rested, and of feeling them obey the impulse of his brain, translating the strange thoughts that had thrilled him since his earliest boyhood. A wild desire to pour forth in sounds which she would understand the passion and pain of his yearning toward her surged through him. Ah, that he could make the organ cry to her what he had never dared to cry: "Love me; love me; love me." For a moment he sat in imagination, holding her, willingly won, in his arms. Then he turned from his flashing vision as from a temptation.

It was after their return from abroad that the man who timidly called Mrs. Trenton wife came into his title of "husband of the organist," for, despite his wealth, she clung to her bench in the organ loft on Sundays. She had grown farther than ever away from him, yet, as he sat each week with the crowd of worshipers at St. Alban's Cathedral, while at her will the roll of the great organ filled the edifice, she still looked to him as in the days when he had first dreamt of winning her — as pure and beautiful and serene as a far-off star. But he had ceased to dream that he could put out his arms and bring the star down to him.

As years went by and nothing was changed between them, his position grew too hard to endure. As he brooded, he was frightened by a womanish desire to weep in his wife's presence — to reach out his arms toward her with a longing cry of "Love me; love me." And better the bitterness of death than that, he thought. So he decided to go away from her until his strength should return to him. He told her at their parting that she would be happier without him, and she did not deny it. It was only the sinking of heart he felt as he went away that told him he had hoped she would deny it. Then he would not have gone.

The husband of the organist of St. Alban's came, after several years had passed, to be looked upon rather as a negative quantity in the city which, ignorant of his early struggles, had known his later success. Only the splendid mansion on a fashionable thoroughfare, where his wife lived in her lonely elegance, was a silent testimonial to the man who had won the right to something better than exile. Yet it would be unfair to Mrs. Trenton not to believe that there were times when her heart swelled with gratitude as well as loneliness.

It was generally understood, after a while, that John Trenton's marriage had not been as successful as his other undertakings, and that he was indeed self-exiled from the city. The circumstance served to make the organist of St. Alban's much more interesting than she otherwise would have been to a good many people not habitual church-goers, and her power over the great Cathedral organ, coupled with her pale, ethereal beauty, set her apart in the minds of others, even as John Trenton had set her in

his heart long ago. She was invariably gentle, invariably kind, but invariably cold.

The truth was that John Trenton, using his energies unsparingly day and night in a foreign city, was happier than his wife in the solitude of her splendid home and her long and painful reveries. For a woman is a being who cannot keep her heart cold for a lifetime. In spite of her determination, there will struggle to it the yearning to lavish itself upon a fellow-being, and that yearning had come to Mrs. Trenton. But there was no one, not even her unloved husband, for her to lavish it upon.

Meanwhile, the beauty of the organist of St. Alban's was growing noticeably more and more ethereal. There were rumors that she was going into a decline, and, whatever the cause, there could be small doubt of the truth of the reports. Her duties at the Cathedral presently became too great a drain upon her strength, and the church was forced reluctantly to accept her resignation. Then came the apparently fruitless effort to replace her.

Mrs. Trenton herself, who had not altogether given up her attendance at the Cathedral, was perhaps the greatest sufferer from the deficiencies of her successors. To her music was a need of life, yet, even in her own home, she played but rarely. It had grown to be an effort, and, when able to rouse herself, the emotion exhausted and weakened her. But she was hungry for it, — for music which could reach her soul.

One Sunday morning the first swelling chords that floated down from the organ loft caused an unusual flutter among the apathetic worshipers, arousing an expectancy which communicated itself to Mrs. Trenton, who turned her face upward toward the invisible player. In a moment the music was pouring into her soul, and she and the entire congregation sat in rapt attention. Chord upon chord, swelling harmonies, daring improvisations, grand, reverent tones came rolling down in cadence — never before had the people of St. Alban's listened to such music. And the former organist, faint, trembling with appreciation, was the first to know it.

When the service was over, many of the more curious lingered to catch a glimpse of the marvelous performer, and were surprised

that the descent of the new organist from the loft was not accompanied by the sound of swishing skirts, and that they beheld a man.

But not so Mrs. Trenton. It was not anthems, as the others thought, to which she had been listening, but to an appeal — an appeal from one man to one woman. And she had recognized it. Under the thrilling, vibrating harmony of sound she had heard that old, despairing, longing cry, "Love me; love me; love me."

She was ready to give him her hand calmly when he reached her, but during the short drive home she found it impossible to look at him. What was it that was so gripping her heart strings? She could not answer. When they had entered the house, they faced each other alone.

"Was it indeed you?" she asked breathlessly.

"It was indeed I," he said. He folded his arms, strengthening himself.

She was looking at him — her heart growing tumultuous — wondering what she ought to say — what he expected her to say. She tried to think only of his playing — to tell him how much greater his genius was than hers — how she acknowledged his musical supremacy. She thought she was going to say it calmly.

"I shall have to bow to you now," she began, but his face told her how futile and inadequate were the words. She read what he wanted her to say. Could she?

He stood with folded arms, motionless, silent, his face set and white. She understood. He would not say to her now, "Love me"; she must say it.

At last she found her voice, faint and trembling. "Forgive me," she said; "forgive me, and — and — love me as you did."

He reached his arms out passionately, and, for the first time in his life, took a wife into them.

Young Man

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